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ART. XI. — 1. *Histoire de France depuis les Temps les plus reculés jusqu'en 1789.* Par HENRI MARTIN. Quatrième Édition. Paris. 1861. 17 vols. 8°.

2. *Catalogue de la Bibliothèque Impériale de Paris. — Histoire de France.* 8 vols. in 4. Paris: Didot. 1861.

THE year 1820 should be gratefully remembered, at least among the French, as one of the most remarkable in the annals of modern science. It was then that Augustin Thierry, “young, poor, and unknown,” first published in a Paris paper, called *Le Courier*, those historical letters which may be said to have opened a new era in the science of history. A stanch supporter of the party which under the Bourbons made such strenuous efforts to obtain for France a constitution akin to that of England, Thierry was investigating the origin of the French monarchy in quest of proofs and arguments to support his political opinions, when the irresistible attraction incident to historical researches soon revealed to him the career which he was destined to pursue with such eminent success. A critical survey of old charts and chronicles brought to light a multitude of facts previously misunderstood or unknown, which gradually altered all his notions of past events, and convinced him that a truthful history of France was yet to be written. Not only many deeds related in Mezerai, Velley, and the most noted historians had no existence save in their imagination, but the leading inferences drawn by the few philosophers who had attempted from facts really known to deduce principles and general considerations, were totally void of truth, and conveyed a most erroneous notion of the sources and characteristics of the race. The words *French, Throne, Monarchy*, gave then, so to speak, the philosophical formula of the primeval history of France. We all recollect Thierry’s eloquent description of his surprise and emotion, when permitted to peruse for the first time that chapter in Chateaubriand where the Franks are depicted in their true light. “Decked with the skins of bears, seals, aurochs, and wild boars,” — such appeared that *French king*, Chlodio, who in fact was only a German chieftain who never ruled over a foot

of the present territory of France; or that other *Roi*, Clovis, whose army is made to embrace Christianity at a time when they and the rest of the nation were much better Christians than they have ever been since. In like manner did it fare with France,—its territory so fantastically defined, and its monarchy invariably made to represent an unbroken succession of fourteen centuries, although those early *kings*, Pharamond, Merowig, Chilperic, and their successors for many years after them, were scarcely superior to the Ojibway or Pawnee chiefs who roam over our Western prairies. The fact is—however paradoxical—that, if we wish to find the origin of the French monarchy, we must search for it “this side of the feudal times.”

The doubtful veracity of the historians was not their only fault. Even if all the facts had been given in their chronological order, the compilations of the last three centuries would still have lacked that first requisite,—then unknown, now an object of ridicule among a certain class of writers,—which is called in French *la couleur locale*. Take, for instance, that praiseworthy attempt to give a veracious account of the acts and deeds of the Franks, from the time when the tribe first appeared under that name to the fall of the Merovingian dynasty, the *Gesta Francorum* of Adrian de Valois (1646–58). Strictly speaking, this is as faithful as chronological details can make it, and some scholars may deem it for their interest to consult all of its three folio volumes; but as an historical composition it is not readable. And when we compare it with the “Narratives of the Merovingian Times,” although Valois, as well as Thierry, follows, step by step, Gregory of Tours, almost the only authority, we see at a glance that what is requisite in history is not a summary of names and dates, and battles fought and conquests accomplished, but that, whatever it may be, which vivifies the times, the men, the events, and gives the reader a deep insight into the nature, motives, and ruling passions both of the victor and the vanquished.

It was through Thierry that students of history were first enabled to gain a clear conception of the Gallic world and races as they existed in the sixth century. The men he describes

are really the men of those barbarous times, and not, as had before been the case, moderns fancifully travestied. We witness the antagonism, not of wholly unlike races, as we were led to believe, but of straggling clans which had already borrowed from each other manners, laws, almost religions. We see Gallo-Romans approaching to the Barbarians, Barbarians resembling the Gallo-Romans, and beneath that mass, already congenial in many respects, and destined soon to be merged in a homogeneous people, the degenerate Romans, — a connecting link between the contending parties. The scenes described initiate the reader into the mysteries of a life which has not its like with us or around us, and the most insignificant episodes are made to exhibit in a vivid light the inner workings of past events strange and suggestive. The immediate result of Thierry's works was to remodel the entire method of history, and to create a school which numbers among its disciples the greatest names of modern science and literature, so that the French may now boast of a series of national histories which stand unsurpassed. They have Augustin Thierry, and his brother Amédée, Fauriel, and Barante, paving the way for Henri Martin and Michelet, who are succeeded — in the order of subjects — by Thiers, Mignet, and Vaulabelle. Through these writers we have an unbroken series, commencing with the first exploits of the Gauls, some say in the sixteenth century before Christ, to end with the Bourbons ; — from seventy to eighty volumes which combine historical truth, as far as the knowledge of the times and the spirit of the age permit, with literary excellence and tolerable political impartiality.

Such vast results cannot, however, be ascribed to one man entirely, great as may have been his genius and influence. There were many causes which, though latent only, did nevertheless exist long before Thierry. For instance, no other country possesses so voluminous a mass of original documents as France. The Catalogue of her Imperial Library devotes eight quarto volumes to a mere enumeration of titles relating to her history, the first of which alone contains nearly fourteen thousand articles ; and among these we find such collections as the *Recueils* of Montfaucon,* Dom Bouquet,† Dom

* 5 vols. folio, 1729 – 1733.

† 22 vols. folio, 1738 – 1855.

Rivet,* and Laurière.† On the score of national gifts, we must also admit that the French genius is well adapted to the science of history. Among the special endowments for this work we would name a mind thoroughly analytical, ordinarily averse as a rule to details and minutiae; an irresistible desire to generalize and ascend to principles; a disposition to seek in all branches of human knowledge collateral proofs and examples; ingenuity in the choice of methods; enthusiasm in the pursuit of great ideas; readiness to employ to advantage all new discoveries, and, finally, that sort of abnegation which prompts a writer to select one particular period, even under its most ungrateful aspect, to devote to it all his energies, and thus to smooth for others, who alone reap the honor, a task which, though difficult in itself, frequently depends upon the previous labors of many such modest workers. We may add to these national qualifications, a language elegant, forcible, and remarkably clear, which forbids all ambiguity. The great historians are, also, kept in check by an array of technical critics, themselves incompetent to produce anything original, but singularly happy in their mode of criticism, and always on the alert to detect and expose to ridicule the least mistake or inconsistency, and by the salutary dread of a public opinion altogether without mercy.

These advantages, however, are not without their offsets. A vivid imagination wellnigh counterbalances the analytic faculty, and impatience to arrive at definite principles prompts hypotheses which ultimate investigations do not always confirm. Anxious to command the attention of all classes of readers, the historians frequently strive to “make points,” — adorn their perorations with epigrams and antitheses, and illustrate their leading chapters with obsolete anecdotes and personal details, which, although not uninteresting, are sometimes out of place in stately historical compositions. They seem to be constantly in search not so much of truth as of originality; yet many among them are wont to work in schools, to keep up traditions, and to follow in the wake of some bold leader, whose novelties of style and method they take great pains to imitate with a sort of clock-work regular-

* 22 vols. 4to, 1733 – 1859.

† 21 vols. folio, 1723 – 4–.

ity. Another defect consists in a very exalted opinion of the power and destiny of their native land. All nations are proud of themselves, whatever may be their real greatness or insignificance; nor is this much to be regretted. National vanity often urges a people to extraordinary efforts, that become in the course of time landmarks which they ever afterwards endeavor to reach. Whether true or fancied, their martial deeds form the theme of popular traditions, which throw a certain ideality over the history of the people, well calculated to arouse all their energy and patriotism when needed. We are, therefore, disposed to view with indulgence the exaggerated praise which historians rarely fail to bestow, when about to relate the exploits of the nation they wish to instruct or flatter; but we must say there is a limit to rhetorical patriotism. And now that we are sufficiently enlightened to bear the truth, provided the dose is small and gently administered, the least we can expect is, that modern historians should not base their voluminous compilations upon comparisons invidious to other nations, however flattering to their own. The French, we are sorry to say, till of late tolerably sober in that use of self-congratulation, do, in their more modern works, indulge in it with a redundancy strongly suggestive of Oriental hyperbole. Witness the following from the Preface to M. Henri Martin's celebrated History of France.

“Sons of the Gauls by our birth and natural dispositions; sons of the Romans by our education; revived by intermingling with the German barbarians at a time when ancient civilization was losing its vitality; connected by old alliances with Iberia and Greece, — we can now see that not accident alone directed the blood of all the great races of antiquity to mix with Gallic blood in our veins, nor produced the slow formation of the French people upon this Gaulish soil, which, placed in the centre of Europe, embraces all climates, unites all products, and lies in close proximity to all nations. Such could but be the field prepared by Providence for a nation destined to become the band of the European sheaf, and the pioneer of modern civilization; for a nation which was to unite the greatest originality with a unique aptness in combining the qualities and leading traits scattered among other peoples, and to become, as it were, an epitome of Europe; — in fine, for a nation supremely comprehensive and supremely active, which from its infancy has represented in the world the doctrine of the

immortality of the soul with as much sublimity as Judæa represented the principle of God's unity; which saved the West from Islamism, raised and lowered the Papal theocracy, recovered in its bosom, under the thick sediment left by the Germanic invasions, the glorious traces of Greece and Rome; which was, by turns, the focus of Catholicism and the cradle of Philosophy, and crowned its heroic deeds by planting the standard of liberty and equality upon the ruins of the feudal world; thus imposing upon itself a new mission, in which, God grant, it may never fail!"

Great as may be our desire to believe in the existence of another chosen people, destined to inaugurate in this sublunary world of ours a sort of political millennium, — and perfectly willing that a task so grand should be ascribed to the French nation, towards which we feel no ill-will whatever, — we are loath to follow M. Martin throughout the length and breadth of this magnificent eulogium, and wish to apply to it one of the tests so frequently used in the French school of criticism. They say, and it is almost a truism, that a long series of historical facts is to be judged by their ultimate results; those facts forming a continuous chain of events, all philosophically connected, and tending towards ends necessary and beneficial. It is not unreasonable to assume, that one of the most necessary and beneficial of a nation's constant efforts, — that which reflects in a true light its genius and aspirations, — consists in the devising, perfecting, and securing of that ruling power, the fountain-head of a nation's greatness, called *government*. A people's claims to superiority and supremacy may, therefore, be meted according to the intrinsic worth and absolute excellence attained in this paramount object; for, as M. de Maistre justly observes, "Les peuples n'ont jamais que le gouvernement qu'ils méritent." We now beg the student of history to examine the forms of government the French have always had, and that in which they glory now.

Withal, especially as historians, they may be said to have greatly distinguished themselves; not that until recently they could boast of any one historical composition embracing all their annals, and perfect; but they always possessed histories of great merit, in whatever light we may wish to view them. As far back as the sixteenth century their repeated attempts

in the difficult task of constructing a national history, based upon original sources, evince an erudition and method which did not exist in the other branches of knowledge at the time. To this day the works of Pasquier (1560) and Fauchet (1579) command the respect of historical students, even when compared with the magnificent compositions of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, which they imitated and strove to surpass. Mezerai himself (1643–1651), were it only on account of his forcible style and his independence, fully deserves a popularity of nearly two centuries. The History of Father Daniel (1696–1755), although containing many errors and the most intolerable partiality, is a very creditable production. When treating of the origins of the French monarchy, he boldly points out untruths which it required nearly a century to eradicate from the compendiums in daily use; and it certainly showed much boldness in a writer who belonged to the order of the Jesuits, to eliminate from French chronology, as early as 1696, not less than four spurious kings. He was persecuted for it, and to that spirit of intolerance which lasted so long we may perhaps ascribe the imperfections and reticences to be found in all the historical works published in the eighteenth century. Freret, an historian of the loftiest genius, whose multifarious essays are considered as masterpieces to this day, was committed a prisoner to the Bastille for having attempted to dispel, in a celebrated memoir, the grossest errors touching the origins of the French nation. What that man might have accomplished, if left to follow the natural bent of a powerful mind, may well be inferred from his various contributions to the *Memoirs of the Academy* (1714 *et infra*). He had to relinquish his profound investigations into the early history of France, and applied his genius to studies which were not fraught with such terrible dangers. And what was the result? Hear Thierry: “His admirable clearness of mind extracted a new science from darkness and chaos. The chronology of times deprived of history, the origin and migration of nations, the affinities of languages and races, were for the first time established upon a sound basis.”

French history, viewed philosophically and politically, was

also the object of thorough investigations at an early date. We find Francis Hotman, in his *Franco Gallia* (1573), a work which held its reputation for more than two centuries, boldly proclaiming that the kingly power was formerly elective among the Germans and Franks, and that despotism is of modern date. At a later period, but under the same influence, though with very different motives, a nobleman, Bou-lainvilliers, sets the whole thinking world in motion with the startling axiom, that feudal government is the master-piece of the human mind, and that all the civil liberties enjoyed by the masses are so many encroachments upon the rights of the nobility. A man of the people, Dubos, takes up the gauntlet, and attempts to prove that the Franks never conquered the Gauls, who simply permitted them to settle upon the ruins of the Gallo-Roman empire. Then come the great Montesquieu, who vainly endeavors to hold an equal balance between these two extremes, and Mably, who forms out of all preceding systems a sort of political eclecticism, which has at least the merit of inclining in favor of free institutions. We mention those works simply on account of their originality and erudition, which are certainly surprising when we consider the men, the times, and the government under which they were written. Why Hotman and Dubos were permitted to express such advanced opinions, while Freret was incarcerated in a dungeon, has always been a matter of surprise to those who seem to forget that incongruities and contradictions are not incompatible with the workings of a tyrannical government.

It would be long and tedious to mention the names and works of all the French writers who down to our time have given evidence of rare talents, and obtained success in the field of historical investigation; but we cannot dismiss the subject without speaking of Fauriel, who died in 1844. No literary character ever left in France a memory so universally dear to his contemporaries as Claude Fauriel. As a man, his simplicity never failed to command the love and respect of every one; as a scholar, his reputation will certainly be enduring. He worked incessantly for the sake of truth alone, and shunned rather than courted the admiration which his

disinterested efforts always elicited. His original researches, which covered nearly the whole range of human knowledge, were always at the disposal of any one who wished to make a given subject his own ; and we know of very few literary or scientific men of any note, now living in Europe, who are not indebted to him for a certain share of their reputation. In that brilliant array of poets, critics, historians, and scholars of all classes, who shed such lustre on the first quarter of the present century, we find many who, in public and in private, gladly acknowledged their great obligations to the modest Fauriel. Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand, Guizot, Ampere, and the two Thierry's, in France ; Goethe and Schlegel, in Germany ; Manzoni, Monti, and Botta, in Italy ; not to speak of the multitude of second-rate personages who have since risen into eminence, — all pronounce his name with gratitude and veneration. History, in its high and philosophical sense, was the object which he pursued with zeal and delight. True it is, that he was likewise a literary man of the first order ; but he always made literature subservient to history. If he published a work on the popular songs of Modern Greece, it was not so much to set forth their literary merit as to commemorate the noble patriotism which breathes through every line in them. Nor is this all. Like a true historian, he delighted in ascending to the mysterious times when history and poetry were blended, in the only form, perhaps, which could insure their perpetuity. In his *History of Provençal Poetry*, he chiefly endeavors to exhibit the dawn of modern civilization ; for it was in the South of France that the new state of things which arose from struggles so often renewed between the German conquerors and the Roman world first assumed a definite organization ; “ and the ideas which ruled the Middle Ages, finding in chivalry their social form, and in Provençal poetry their first expression, reached thence over all the European nations.” This latter work, however, was to be simply a division of the great history which his untimely death prevented him from completing.

The second part,* which is the only part that he completed and published, gives an exhaustive survey of the events in

* *History of Southern Gaul under the German Conquerors*, 4 vols., 8vo, 1845.

Gaul, from the great invasion of the Barbarians in the fifth century, down to the dismemberment of the Frankish empire under the last Carlovingians. Unlike many historians, he does not strive to command the interest of his readers by terrible accounts of bloody feuds, but seeks, under the obscurity which seems always to cover the existence of the masses when once the silent victims of invasions and conquests, the latent remains of a civilization destined to come to life again, and the aspirations of that unfortunate people so often ruined and enslaved by foreign hordes. If some of the more modern historians have adduced many specious reasons to prove that those invasions were a real blessing, as they are supposed to have infused some fresh blood into the decayed body of the Latin races, the reader may rest assured that our author is far from showing such unqualified admiration for conquerors who retarded rather than advanced the rise of a new Gallo-Roman civilization. Judging from the title, one might suppose that Fauriel limits himself to a history of the South; but he gives a general history of the whole of Gaul during five centuries, and one to which nothing of importance can ever be added. It is a noble work, which possesses all perfections except style. Fauriel might have written with as much force and elegance as any of the most celebrated authors of his time; but subject and incidents so absorbed him, that he never deemed it a matter of importance to give an attractive form to any of his works. His full capacity to add literary perfection to all other merits is rendered strikingly evident by certain recitals, as the Revolt of Gundovald, for instance, which is scarcely inferior to the best narrations of Thierry, his pupil and friend.

With so many works of sterling merit, all of which laid bare historical periods before imperfectly known, it was to be expected that the French public should long for a general history, covering the entire ground from the Merovingians to the Bourbons. All the old convents, collections, and archives had been explored, and public libraries flung open to crowds of eager students, who sought with feverish enthusiasm some fact, date, or name long forgotten, and likely to shed new light upon obscure passages in their annals. Not satisfied with republishing Joinville, Froissart, Comines, and that host of good old chroniclers, a society had been formed for the pur-

pose of translating for the first time, and publishing in a cheap form, a vast number of memoirs which had long lain buried in oblivion. A first collection, under the able editorship of M. Guizot, numbering not less than thirty-one octavo volumes, soon gave way to another, much more complete, in fifty-two volumes, with a continuation in seventy-eight, and a supplement in fifty-six. Reviews, papers, essays, theses, chiefly devoted to history, began to pour upon the reading public with distressing rapidity. All those valuable contributions might well have formed an historical encyclopædia, but never could supply the place of a critical history. In presence of such progressive studies, the works of Anquetil and Lacretelle could not but appear intensely ridiculous; and yet they were the only ones in use. We grant that Sismondi's *Histoire des Français* was held in high esteem by scholars, who found it profitable to quote those thirty volumes, which form a complete and authentic repository of facts, good for consultation, but certainly tiresome, and in many respects totally inadequate. Years elapsed, and the historical fever which Guizot's celebrated lectures on French civilization had carried to its height somewhat subsided, or rather shifted from the Merovingian and feudal times to the more recent periods of the Revolution, Consulate, and Empire. A short time previous, a sort of exotic philosophy of history had become the hobby of certain scholars of note, who devoted their ingenuity to critical reviews and symbolical explanations of facts, before accepted as perfectly intelligible and undeniable. The results obtained by those votaries of Vico, Hegel, and Herder may form the subject of some further disquisition; but for the present suffice it to say, that they did not prove satisfactory to the large majority of readers, who went back rejoicing to a study of mere facts, and soon became clamorous for a national history, which should sum up, in a form attractive and critical, the successful labors of so many historians of undoubted impartiality and erudition. Seeming accident at last realized this most natural desire in a people proud of the past, impatient of the present, and, as we have just seen, claiming the future as their own.

When M. Thiers first wrote his now popular History of the French Revolution, in 1823, he was but little known to fame,

and the publishers deemed it necessary to connect his name on the title-page with that of a man, then somewhat noted, now altogether forgotten, called Felix Bodin. Bodin's claim to this distinction was the purpose on his part to add an Introduction, bringing the History of France down to the year 1789; which, however, never was carried into effect. Thiers's work, under the management of a new publisher, Furne, having proved eminently successful, the plan of publishing an historical introduction was revived. It seems that such a preliminary composition had become absolutely necessary; for the Belgian counterfeiters, without waiting for Furne, took the first epitome they could find, and inserted it in the first volume, where it has not ceased to figure, at least in those miserable reprints. Furne addressed himself to Paul Lacroix, a bibliographer and novelist of great erudition, better known under the name of Jacob the Bibliophile; who referred him to Henri Martin, proffering at the same time the aid of his own name and extensive library. This was in 1833. Martin, then a young man of about twenty-three, who had lately arrived in Paris from St. Quentin, in search of literary employment, which he greatly preferred to the drudgery of an attorney's office, gladly accepted the proposal, and entered at once into his new duties. Gradually the horizon seemed to widen before him; and finding that his classical attainments were not adequate to the task, he renewed with uncommon diligence and success the objects of his early studies. In the first two or three volumes he had made free use of Sismondi, Amédée Thierry, and Michelet; but when reaching the mediæval times, he derived such benefits from a thorough study of the old chroniclers, that, yielding to the advice of his friend Jean Reynaud, he determined to rewrite and remodel the first volume, which he then based upon a complete survey of the original documents. Thus availing himself of all previous labors and modern discoveries, he diligently revised and perfected almost every chapter in his great work, which, instead of being a mere introduction to Thiers's *Revolution and Consulate*, became a most valuable history, entirely original and independent. We have before us, under the date of 1861, what is generally called the fourth edition; but it is doubtful whether there ever were four editions of the

sixteen volumes of text (the seventeenth is wholly devoted to an analytical index). The first forty or fifty books only seem to have been republished so many times.

In the year 1834, a gentleman of the name of Gobert died, leaving a sum of more than eighty thousand dollars, invested in the public funds, the annual interest on which, amounting to twenty thousand francs, was divided into two prizes of ten thousand each, to be distributed annually, one by the French Academy, for the most *eloquent*, the other by the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, for the most *learned* work on the History of France. In 1844, the Academy of Inscriptions awarded the prize in its gift to Henri Martin. Augustin Thierry had been the recipient of the other ever since its foundation, not only because his historical compositions were the most eloquent and perfect in the language, but also in consideration of his almost entire dependence upon the pecuniary compensation attached to this distinction. We may even add, that to his very limited means must be ascribed his constant refusal to be elected a member of the Academy,—an honor which would have cost him his only income. After the death of Thierry in 1856, and again in 1859, the French Academy conferred this much-coveted prize upon Henri Martin without a single dissenting voice. It was the just reward of a work of uncommon merit, which certainly stands foremost among the compositions of the kind in the French or any other language. We do not pretend to say, however, that after this no one will ever attempt to write a history of France, or that it is destined to keep its place for all time to come, as many of M. Martin's friends are inclined to believe. It is the best *now*; but as the science of history is eminently progressive, other compilations must and will follow, embodying the results of further researches, and, to all appearance, philosophical considerations of a higher import or more entirely undeniable than any as yet enounced by M. Martin. Judging from the unexpected results published in several monographs of modern date, it may be that several periods will need to be rewritten, some curtailed, and others lengthened, simply on the score of facts thus far misunderstood or but partially known. Such seems to be the destiny of all works which rest upon a basis apparently scientific and sure, but admitting of such a

wide scope as never to assume the definitive and incontestable character belonging to compositions where the imagination plays no part whatever. As a work of thrilling interest, it has rarely been equalled. The most barren epochs are presented in an attractive form, which allows the reader to find in biographical and literary sketches a compensation for that dryness often unavoidable when the historian wishes to state the truth, and nothing but the truth. Some parts are treated in a masterly manner; and it is generally conceded that the several chapters devoted to a critical analysis of literary characters and works present the most complete and trustworthy history of French literature as yet written. The history of philosophy, from the ordeal to which it was subjected in the mediæval school, to its final development under the Cartesians, not only in France, but in Holland and Germany, is set forth in a clear, elegant, and comprehensive form. The intricate systems of Spinoza and Leibnitz, well digested and lucidly summed up, impart to the reader, at a very light cost, an amount of knowledge previously accessible to very few. The arrangement is perfect, and evinces a method which must remain as a standard for all future historians; for whatever may be the results of further investigations, it is evident that they cannot alter our present conception of the entire field of French history, which, we think, is now complete, at least in its general outline. From this vast panorama it will be easy to extract scenes, incidents, and generalizations that may be worked into philosophical systems, and proofs to refute or sustain systematic opinions. These opinions, however, can never exercise a lasting influence, if incorrect, so long as the data from which they were derived are properly and fully stated; — because the reader may then judge for himself; as will certainly be the case when he is called upon to sift the theories so elegantly embodied in M. Martin's work. We should, therefore, view with liberality the interpretations — not to say hypotheses — which abound in the history before us; receive with great confidence the materials on which they seem to rest; admire the eloquence and genuine enthusiasm which vivify almost every line in the work; and absolve the spirit that prompted the author to extract from the whole conclusions so flattering to his nation and countrymen.